

October 31, 2017

The Honorable Representative Patricia A. Serpa
State of Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairwoman Serpa:

Thank you for the ongoing opportunity to share information on the progress the State is making towards improving RI Bridges and the way in which we deliver health and human services to Rhode Islanders.

This submission shares data from **September 25 through October 8, 2017.**

Below, please find our monthly updates and attachments in addition to our standing bi-weekly submission points. The standard FNS data reports are not attached because, with FNS' permission, we have paused our submissions. When we resume submitting these reports we will include them in our bi-weekly submission.

Standing Bi-Weekly Updates and Attachments:

1. Correspondences with federal partners –

Please see the following attachments:

- DHS received a FNS letter approving the FFY 2018 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education (SNAP-Ed) Plan on September 27, 2017.
- DHS received a FNS letter approving the SNAP Outreach plan (FFY 2018) on September 27, 2017
- DHS received a FNS letter approving the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) Program Plan on September 29, 2017.
- DHS received a FNS letter approving a waiver to allow a Standard Medical Deduction Demonstration Project on September 29, 2017
- DHS submitted the FFY 2018 Management Evaluation Review Plan to FNS on October 5, 2017. DHS FFY 2018 Management Evaluation Review materials attached.

2. Number of off-cycle payments for the Child Care Assistance Program –

77 off-cycle payments were made during this period.

3. Interim payments for Long Term Services and Supports –

12 off-cycle payments were made during this period.

Monthly Updates and Attachments:

1. Update on staffing and training plans at the Department of Human Services

Hiring –

We continue to make progress on our hiring plan. To date, we have hired 143 of our 143 goal, 141 of whom have started their new positions with the Department including our latest cohort of employees who started on October 1.

To comply with the State's collective bargaining agreements, postings for union positions must be advertised for five days on the State's internal lateral human resources website. If these positions are not filled, they are then posted on Rhode Island's public web page.

We have hired our remaining position, a Supervising Eligibility Technician. This individual will start in their new role on October 29. All of our 143 hires will have started in their new roles by the end of October.

Onboarding of new staff began February 5, 2017 and will continue as necessary going forward.

Training –

Over the last several weeks, Staff Development Unit continued to implement the Learning Lab. The Learning Lab is a space created for Eligibility Technicians and their supervisors where staff have the opportunity to practice in RI Bridges in a self-paced learning environment. The Learning Lab has prepared lessons that target expressed areas of focus with an emphasis of building capacity on RI Bridges. The Lab will last 12 weeks covering basic navigation, processing interim and recertification, and troubleshooting strategies and complex cases.

In addition, MAGI training continues to be delivered. The Staff Development Unit participated in a one-week Train-the-Trainer session facilitated by Deloitte. Finally, Customer Service Aids were provided shoulder-to-shoulder training on Application Registration by Deloitte.

2. Changes in State personnel involved with the project

No changes were made during this period.

3. Overall system improvements and focus areas

The state made a number of system improvements and enhancements during the month of September, including a major development release on September 30. Key improvements from September are as follows:

- Online Customer Experience: Customer Portal users will be able to more efficiently navigate the portal through a series of usability changes including clearer on-page instructions, help text, and validation messages.
- HSRI Open Enrollment Renewal Flow: A "Short Flow" was implemented to expedite the processing of HSRI renewals in the Worker Portal. During Open Enrollment, a worker can process renewals for existing customers by visiting only five screens rather than needing to complete an entire application.
- Notice Improvements: A new LTSS notice has been created to inform Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) providers of their patients' eligibility and co-pay amount. The Rite Share template was revised to make notices clearer, consistent and standardized.

- SNAP Households: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) household group composition logic was updated so that all mandatory members are included in the SNAP household composition.
- DCYF Case Processing: DCYF case transitions from Medicaid to DCYF-MA can be performed more efficiently to allow children in foster care to begin their DCYF Medicaid at the start of the following month instead of having to wait until the month following with a 1-month gap.
- LTSS – SSI Case Processing: Eligibility for Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) assistance requests can now be processed independently of each other. This benefits customers because a change in SSI will not automatically impact their LTSS coverage. LTSS workers will be able to review income changes and update LTSS eligibility prior to Medicaid negative action.

As we've indicated, our aim is to get the system to a place where it is correctly determining eligibility and making payments in a timely manner, accurately dispersing benefits, meeting federal requirements, providing workers with the tools necessary to be productive and customers with a user-friendly experience. Below, please find recent challenges we've prioritized in support of these goals.

- SNAP FPL: Every year, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), issues new Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) that must be incorporated into SNAP benefits nationwide. This year was the first time in a few years that the USDA lowered the minimum and maximum SNAP benefit allotments, in addition to increasing certain SNAP deductions. In order to implement the federally mandated COLAs for October 1, DHS had to rerun eligibility on the entire active SNAP caseload. Certain pending case changes, such as a change in household income, size, and expenses, which had not yet been processed were picked up during the eligibility rerun. This resulted in some cases receiving an increase or decrease in SNAP benefits above the \$1-10 change SNAP recipients normally experience with a COLA update. Additionally, certain cases could not be updated due to system errors. In total, DHS was able to update approximately two-thirds of the SNAP households before Oct 1. The rest of the SNAP households were updated during the first two weeks in October. Remaining cases require worker action and will need to be manually updated in the upcoming weeks as they are individually worked by DHS staff.
- Open Enrollment and Change Freeze Period Preparedness: This is a priority across the agencies as the system will not be modified or enhanced in any significant way for four months starting in later October. To ensure greater success, some Open Enrollment functionality intended for the September 30 release was pushed to the October 21 release as functionality was not built and/or fixed in time to be validated. These delays included fixes to general Open Enrollment User Acceptance Testing defects as well as functionality related to Cross-Policy Year coverage and Year-end Batches.

Attached Reports:

- Daily Health Report



Thank you for allowing us to provide details related to the State's RI Bridges improvement efforts. If you, or the Committee, have any further questions regarding the project, or any other matter, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Zachary W. Sherman", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Zachary W. Sherman
Director
HealthSource RI

CC: Honorable Members of House Committee on Oversight